*** Note: Items highlighted in gray do not need translation*

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SECTION 1: Display Type

HEADLINE: Called to Serve, Not to Suffer: Mongolia Addresses Torture in Its Military Ranks

DECK: Soldiers are grossly abused by superiors at alarming rates, resulting in serious injuries and even death. Here's what the country is doing about it.

A recent report found scores of men abused by their superiors, resulting in injuries and even death. New reforms aim to stop the cycle.

TWEET: This Mongolian soldier was tortured by his own captain. He's not alone. Here's what the country is doing about it.

NEWSLETTER TEASER: Torture in the Ranks: Mongolian soldiers experience alarming rates of abuse from superiors, leading to serious injuries and even death. New reforms aim to stop the cycle.

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SECTION 2: Bylines

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ZUUNBAYAN, DORNOGOVI PROVINCE, MONGOLIA — Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan had been guarding the weapons warehouse since midnight in the January freeze, and he was cold. Five minutes before his shift ended, he went inside to warm up.

That fateful decision in 2017 would get Bayartsogt and his fellow soldiers tortured by their commanding officer, leave him permanently disabled, and making him one more statistic in Mongolia's long history of human rights violations inside the military.

Seeing Bayartsogt end his duty early, the deputy captain gathered all eight junior guards. He commanded them to strip naked. He poured cold water on their heads and chests. Ordered them to lay on the cold concrete floor. Run around the faraway guard tower. When they returned, he beat them on their backs with a metal rod. Then he stepped on Bayartsogt's toes with his military boots. Bayartsogt lost consciousness from the excruciating pain.

Nine of his toes had to be amputated, leaving him without balance and mentally unable to hold down a steady job. Six years on, Bayartsogt, 27, says his feet still haven't healed.

"In winter, my feet get cold very quickly," he says. "In the summer, my feet get hot and watery. I have not fully recovered yet."

Illegal punishment is common in Mongolia's military, where 44 soldiers have died and 468 violations have been reported in the last decade, according to a 2022 report by the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia. It states that 45% of former soldiers say they were physically abused and harassed. After hearing reports of torture like Bayartsogt's, the commission has conducted surprise inspections and is training mental health professionals to serve in the military.

The reforms are urgently needed, say former soldiers and families interviewed by Global Press Journal. They say military inspections are poorly done, there is no clear internal process to file complaints, and whistleblowers face the risk of retribution by commanding officers. The human rights violations affect a large population as all men aged 18 to 27 are required to serve one year in the military, which consists of the border guards, the armed forces and domestic troops.

Neither the defense ministry nor the armed forces responded to several requests for comment. But Minister of Defense Saikhanbayar Gursed acknowledged the violations at a 2021 conference.

"A big sensation has been created in society because of a few officers, management and soldiers who have no education, maturity and culture," he said at the time. "Thousands of mothers are upset. How can the reputation of the 100-year-old armed forces be tarnished?"

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Graphic 1: Deaths and injuries in Mongolia's military

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Erdenebat Batbold's younger brother joined the army in 2019. Three months later, he was dead.

Heartbroken and overwhelmed by his memories, Erdenebat traveled to the military unit in Dornogovi province to claim his brother's body. While changing the cloth covering his brother during the initial funeral rites, "I discovered that my brother's back was black and brown all over. I felt shocked to see the injuries," he recalls.

Erdenebat posted a photo on Facebook with a note that his brother was tortured. His post went viral and two lawyers who saw it helped him get the police to do an autopsy.

“I was there for the forensic analysis to find out the truth,” says Erdenebat. “You know how they butcher animals in the market? The autopsy was exactly like that. I could not stand it.”

The autopsy revealed that his brother had died due to blood clots in his lungs. His brother’s fellow soldiers told Erdenebat they had been tortured by their supervisor. They were made to run carrying mattress rolls on their backs and then do duck walks. When they collapsed from exhaustion, the officer beat them savagely, leading to his brother’s death. And yet none of the soldiers filed an official complaint.

The Human Rights Commission first recorded torture in the military in 2006, and has since regularly inspected military units. The inspections haven’t always worked. The murder of a border guard in 2021 by his commander caused a public outcry and the commission investigated once again.

The 2022 report catalogs a variety of offenses. Some soldiers were beaten, sleep deprived, not allowed to use the bathroom. They were psychologically traumatized. “They forced us soldiers to do things like kiss each other and dance on a wooden post of the tent,” recalls Bayartsogt.

Twenty-five soldiers said they were sexually harassed.

Torture can cast a psychological shadow. Three out of five cases of suicide among conscripts and former soldiers between 2009 and 2021 were linked to depression related to serving in the military, according to the report.

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Graphic 2: Rights violations faced by soldiers in Mongolia’s military

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Despite the prevalence of violations in the military, no soldier filed an official complaint against their supervisors or officers in higher positions in the three years ending in 2021, according to the commission’s report. But nearly 1 in 3 former servicemen said they had wanted to at some point.

Military rules state that soldiers need permission from their commander in order to file a complaint, which increases the risk of retribution.

“Conscripts have very few opportunities to make complaints,” said Myagmarjav Gerel, a consulting professor at the National Defense University, at the 2021 conference on improving working conditions in the military. “It is time to pay attention to adding provisions and clauses to the military regulations that will allow the communication of complaints, suggestions and requests.”

Bayartsogt says that soldiers who complain are nicknamed “leaks” and disliked. Some amount of physical abuse is tolerated because of a stereotype that soldiers should be disciplined. “People can bear suffering,” Bayartsogt says.

Bayartsogt went outside the military system for justice. He posted about his experience on Facebook, which went viral, and the government appointed him a lawyer to file a criminal complaint. The judge found the deputy captain guilty.

**

Otgontsetseg Renchin, a mother of five sons, says she worries about sending her children to serve the country. She has heard many stories of torture; 30 years ago, her older brother was beaten by his officer and returned home on the brink of death, she says. In 2019, she attended a candlelight vigil for Erdenebat’s brother in Erdenet city.

When her oldest son enlisted during the coronavirus pandemic in 2021, she feared for his safety. “As I had psychological trauma and deep fears, it drove me crazy,” she recalls.

Her son was hospitalized twice during his service, for a toothache and for hypertension, she says. When he returned home, he was silent for three months before describing his experience.

“They did not let my son sleep and rest, causing him constant headache and chest pain,” she says.

The Ministry of Defense has to refresh training protocols and develop rules that honor human rights, says Enkhbold Batzeveg, a commissioner with the National Human Rights Commission. The military will develop plans for implementation and the commission will inspect the process every six months, he says.

“We have planned human rights training and promotion activities and will implement them so that soldiers will not experience torture and can file complaints if such situations occur,” Enkhbold says.

The government has created courses in “military psychology” at the National Defense University, the Mongolian National University of Education, and the General Department of Border Protection in Ulaanbaatar to train psychologists and social workers. The first batch will graduate this year and be deployed in the military.

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Seeing Bayartsogt's post on Facebook, a famous singer began a donation campaign on his behalf and collected 47 million Mongolian togrogs (13,511 United States dollars) — enough for Bayartsogt to buy a two-bedroom apartment in Ulaanbaatar.

His wife, Otgonchimeg Dashravdan, says their lives are still defined by the torture. Her husband always wears socks, even in bed. Sometimes their young daughter asks them, "Mom has 10 toes, but why does Dad have no toes? Is it painful?"

"My husband and I having nothing to say in response," she says.

Bayartsogt has been unable to hold down a steady job. He has been a hairdresser, a security guard, a vendor and now pumps gas.

"If I were healthier, I could've had a better job to support my family and have a better life," he says. "I would not be called 'a cripple.'"

Photos:

01_GPJNews_Mongolia_UT_MilitaryTorture_173_T
AP: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan, 27, opens the door of his apartment in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, April 16, 2023.
Story Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan, a former conscript, was tortured in the military in 2017.

01_GPJNews_Mongolia_UT_MilitaryTorture_070_L
AP: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan, 27, fills a tank at his job at a gas station in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, April 16, 2023.
Story Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan cannot hold down a steady job after being tortured while serving in the military. He now works at a gas station in Ulaanbaatar.

****Dyptich** Two Photos, one caption**
02_GPJNews_Mongolia_UT_MilitaryTorture_031_Left
AP Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan, 27, shows his feet at his home in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Jan. 18, 2023. Six years ago, Bayartsogt's leg was frozen, and nine toes were amputated in a military unit.

02_GPJNews_Mongolia_UT_MilitaryTorture_046_Right
AP Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan, 27, puts on a sock at his home in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Jan. 18, 2023. Six years ago, Bayartsogt's leg was frozen, and nine toes amputated in a military unit.

Story Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan’s toes were amputated after excess exposure to freezing temperatures and torture. He wears socks all the time these days to hide his feet.

03_GPJNews_Mongolia_UT_MilitaryTorture_194
AP Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan, 27, prepares breakfast with his daughter, Erkhsaran, 4, at their home in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, April 16, 2023.

Story Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan helps his wife prepare breakfast as their daughter watches. She sometimes asks her father why his toes are missing.

04_GPJNews_Mongolia_UT_MilitaryTorture_292
AP Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan, 27, and his daughters, Erh-Ujin, 8 months, and Erkhsaran, 4, return home from the playground in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, April 16, 2023.

Story Caption: Bayartsogt Jargalsaikhan and his daughters return home from the playground in Ulaanbaatar. He wishes he could provide a better life for them.
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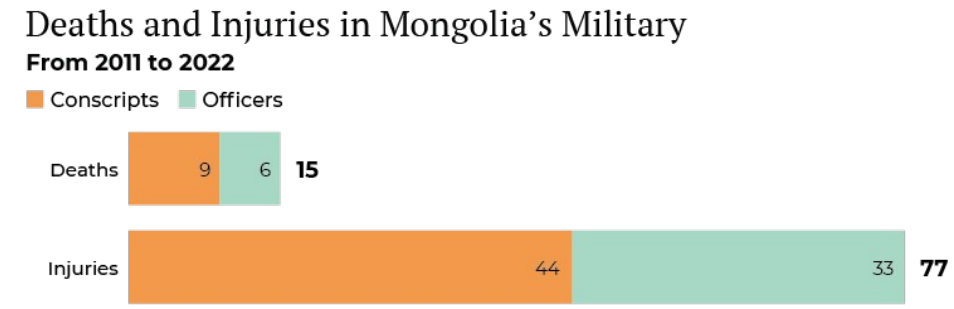
GPJNews_Mongolia_UT_MilitaryTorture

GRAPHIC 1 - DEATHS AND INJURIES IN MONGOLIA’S MILITARY



Монгол улс дахь цэргийн албанд цэргүүдийн амь нас хохирсон болон эрүүл мэндэд хохирол учирсан байдал

2011-2022 он

	ХЦАХ Офицер, ахлагч	Нийт	
Амь нас хохирсон	15	6	9
Эрүүл мэндэд хохирол учруулсан	77	33	44

Судалгааны аргачлал: 2011-2022 оны хооронд прокурорын газраас цэргийн анги, байгууллагатай холбоотой эрүүгийн хэрэг болон гомдлын 124 хавтаст хэргийн материалд хийсэн дүн шинжилгээнд суурилсан мэдээлэл. Гурав дахь ангилал буюу цэргийн албанаас оргон зайлсан 30 тохиолдлыг харуулаагүй болно.

Эх сурвалж: Хүний эрхийн үндэсний комиссын Монгол улс дахь Хүний эрх, эрх чөлөөний байдлын талаарх 21 дэх илтгэл, 2022 он

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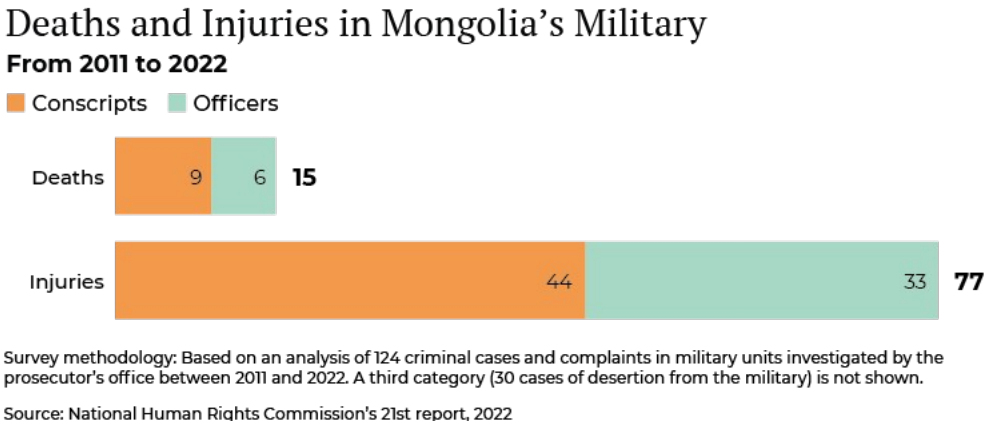

Deaths and Injuries in Mongolia's Military
From 2011 to 2022

	Conscripts	Officers	All soldiers
Deaths	15	6	9
Injuries	77	33	44

Survey methodology: Based on an analysis of 124 criminal cases and complaints in military units investigated by the prosecutor's office between 2011 and 2022. A third category (30 cases of desertion from the military) is not shown.

Source: National Human Rights Commission's 21st report, 2022

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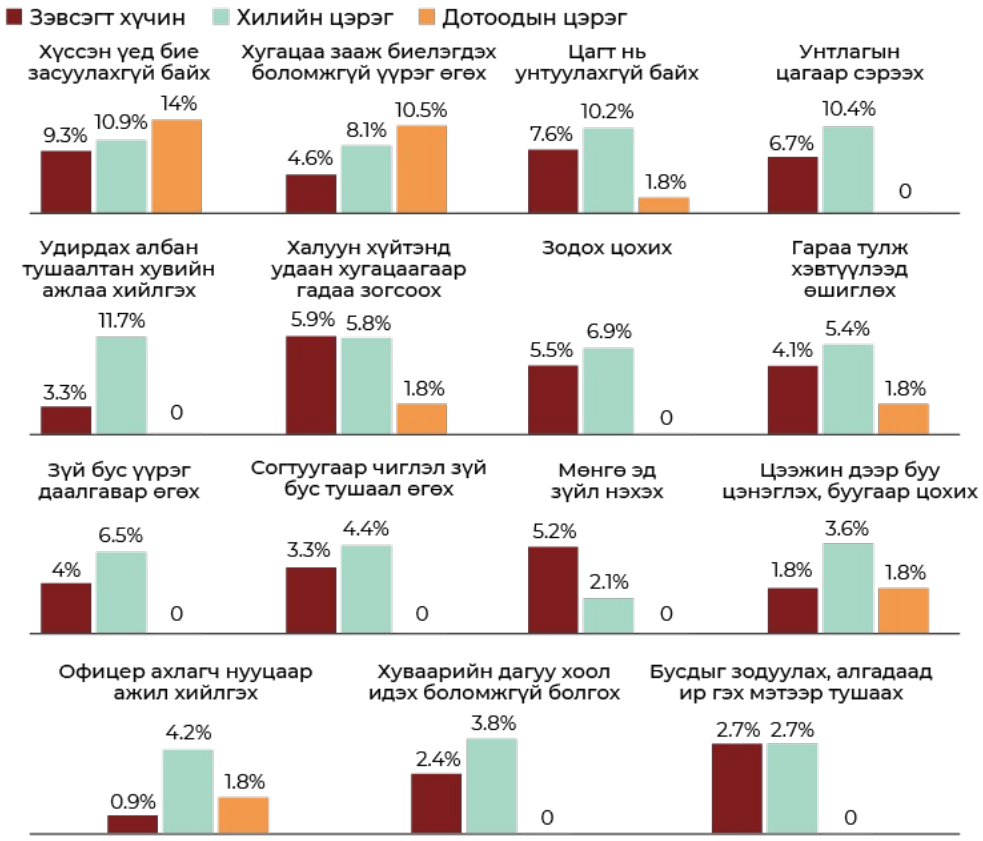
GRAPHIC 2 - RIGHTS VIOLATIONS FACED BY SOLDIERS IN MONGOLIA'S MILITARY

Монгол улс дахь цэргийн албанд цэргүүдийн эсрэг үйлдэгдэж буй хүний эрхийн зөрчлүүд

Цэргийн анги, байгууллагаас мэдээлсэн зөрчлийн төрлүүд, хувиар, 2016-2020 он



Судалгааны аргачлал: Зэвсэгт хүчний (875 хугацаат цэргийн албаа хаагч, 96 ахлагч, офицер) хилийн цэргийн (517 хугацаат цэргийн албаа хаагч, 156 офицер, ахлагч) болон дотоодын цэргийн (57 хугацаат цэргийн албаа хаагч, 10 офицер, ахлагч) 2016-2020 онуудад хугацаат цэргийн албаа хаасан иргэнийг судалгаанд хамруулсан. Судалгаанд оролцогчдын түүврийн бүрдэл нь цэргийн анги, байгууллагын байршил, цэргийн албаа хаагчдын хүн ам зүйн шинжийг хангалттай төлөөлж байна.

Эх сурвалж: Хүний эрхийн үндэсний комиссын Монгол улс дахь Хүний эрх, эрх чөлөөний байдлын талаарх 21 дэх илтгэл, 2022 он

Монгол улс дахь цэргийн албанд цэргүүдийн эсрэг үйлдэгдэж буй хүний эрхийн зөрчлүүд

Цэргийн анги, байгууллагаас мэдээлсэн зөрчлийн төрлүүд, хувиар, 2016-2020 он

	Дотоодын цэрэг	Зэвсэгт хүчин	Хилийн цэрэг
Хүссэн үед бие засуулахгүй байх	9.3	10.9	14
Хугацаа зааж биелэгдэх боломжгүй үүрэг өгөх	4.6	8.1	10.5
Цагт нь унтуулахгүй байх	7.6	10.2	1.8
Унтлагын цагаар сэрээх	6.7	10.4	0
Удирдах албан тушаалтан хувийн ажлаа хийлгэх	3.3	11.7	0
Халуун хүйтэнд удаан хугацаагаар гадаа зогсоох	5.9	5.8	1.8

Зодох цохих	5.5	6.9	0
Гараа тулж хэвтүүлээд өшиглөх	4.1	5.4	1.8
Зүй бус үүрэг даалгавар өгөх	4	6.5	0
Согтуугаар чиглэл зүй бус тушаал өгөх	3.3	4.4	0
Мөнгө эд зүйл нэхэх	5.2	2.1	0
Цээжин дээр буу цэнэглэх, буугаар цохих	1.8	3.6	1.8
Офицер ахлагч нууцаар ажил хийлгэх	0.9	4.2	1.8
Хуваарийн дагуу хоол идэх боломжгүй болгох		2.4	3.8
0			
Бусдыг зодуулах, алгадаад ир гэх мэтээр тушаах		2.7	2.7
0			

Судалгааны аргачлал: Зэвсэгт хүчний (875 хугацаат цэргийн алба хаагч, 96 ахлагч , офицер) хилийн цэргийн (517 хугацаат цэргийн алба хаагч, 156 офицер, ахлагч) болон дотоодын цэргийн (57 хугацаат цэргийн алба хаагч, 10 офицер, ахлагч) 2016-2020 онуудад хугацаат цэргийн алба хаасан иргэнийг судалгаанд хамруулсан. Судалгаанд оролцогчдын түүврийн бүрдэл нь цэргийн анги, байгууллагын байршил, цэргийн алба хаагчдын хүн ам зүйн шинжийг хангалттай төлөөлж байна.

Эх сурвалж: Хүний эрхийн үндэсний комиссын Монгол улс дахь Хүний эрх, эрх чөлөөний байдлын талаарх 21 дэх илтгэл, 2022 он

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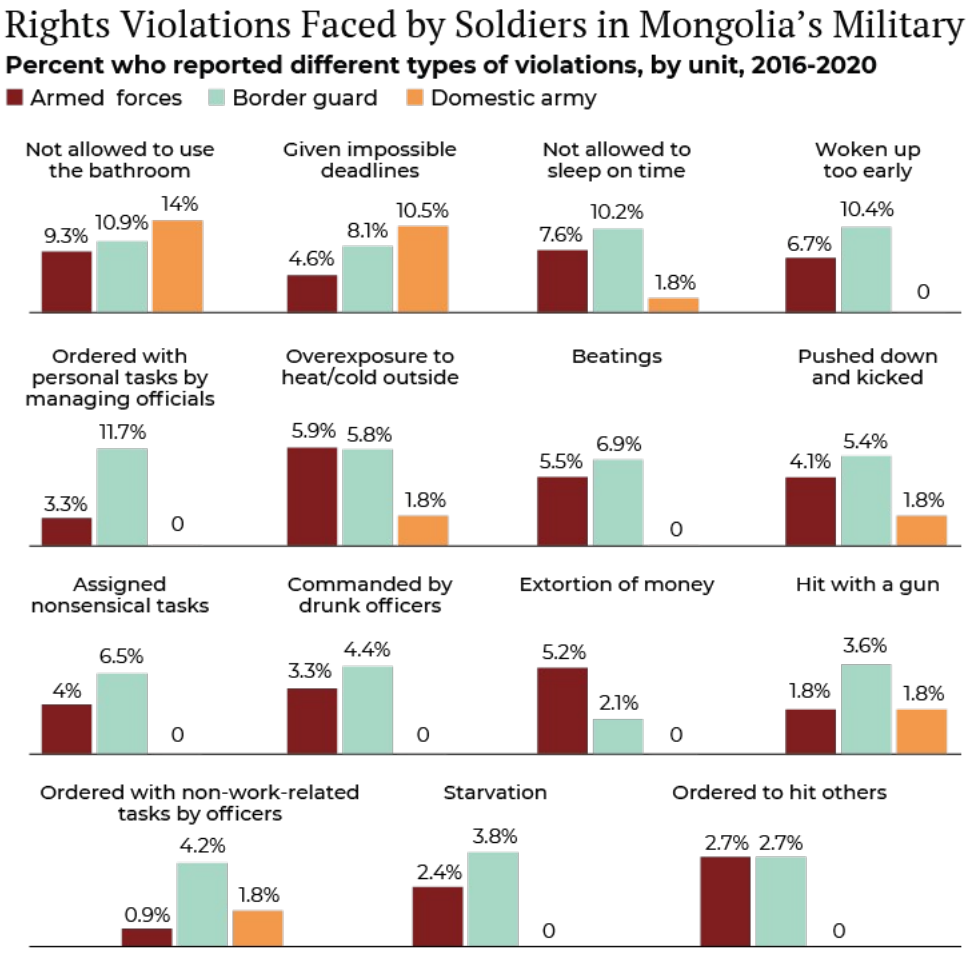

Survey methodology: Members of the armed forces (875 conscripts and 96 officers), border guards (517 conscripts and 156 officers) and domestic troops (57 conscripts and 10 officers) who served between 2016 and 2020 were surveyed. The sampling is representative of the geography and demographics of the military units.

Source: National Human Rights Commission's 21st report, 2022

Rights Violations Faced by Soldiers in Mongolia's Military

Percent who reported different types of violations, by unit, 2016-2020

	Domestic army		Armed for
Border guard			
Not allowed to use the bathroom	9.3	10.9	14
Given impossible deadlines	4.6	8.1	10.5
Not allowed to sleep on time	7.6	10.2	1.8
Woken up too early	6.7	10.4	0
Made to do officer's personal work	3.3	11.7	0
Overexposure to heat/cold outside	5.9	5.8	1.8
Beatings	5.5	6.9	0
Pushed down and kicked	4.1	5.4	1.8
Assigned nonsensical tasks	4	6.5	0
Commanded by drunk officers	3.3	4.4	0
Extortion of money	5.2	2.1	0
Hit with a gun	1.8	3.6	1.8

Being spied on	0.9	4.2	1.8
Starvation	2.4	3.8	0
Ordered to hit others	2.7	2.7	0

Survey methodology: Members of the armed forces (875 conscripts and 96 officers), border guards (517 conscripts and 156 officers) and domestic troops (57 conscripts and 10 officers) who served between 2016 and 2020 were surveyed. The sampling is representative of the geography and demographics of the military units.

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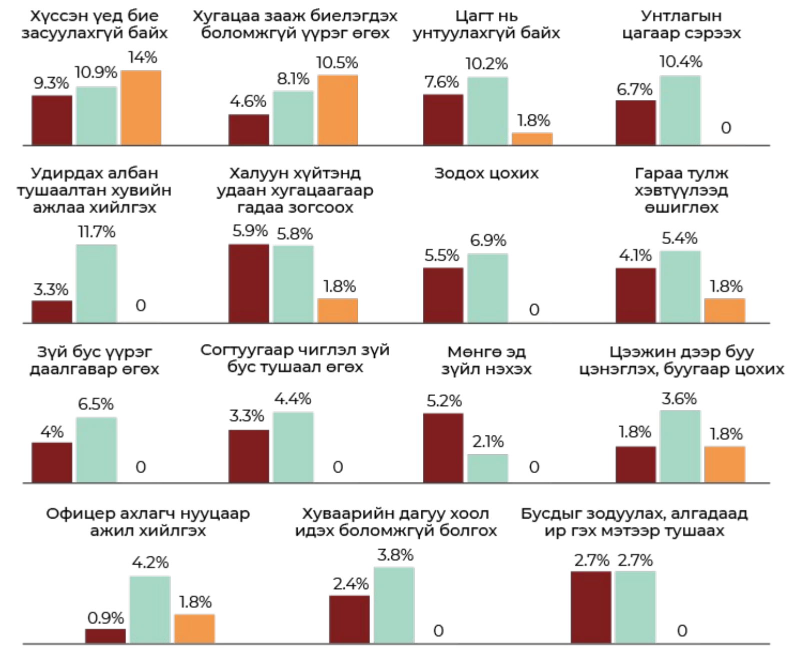

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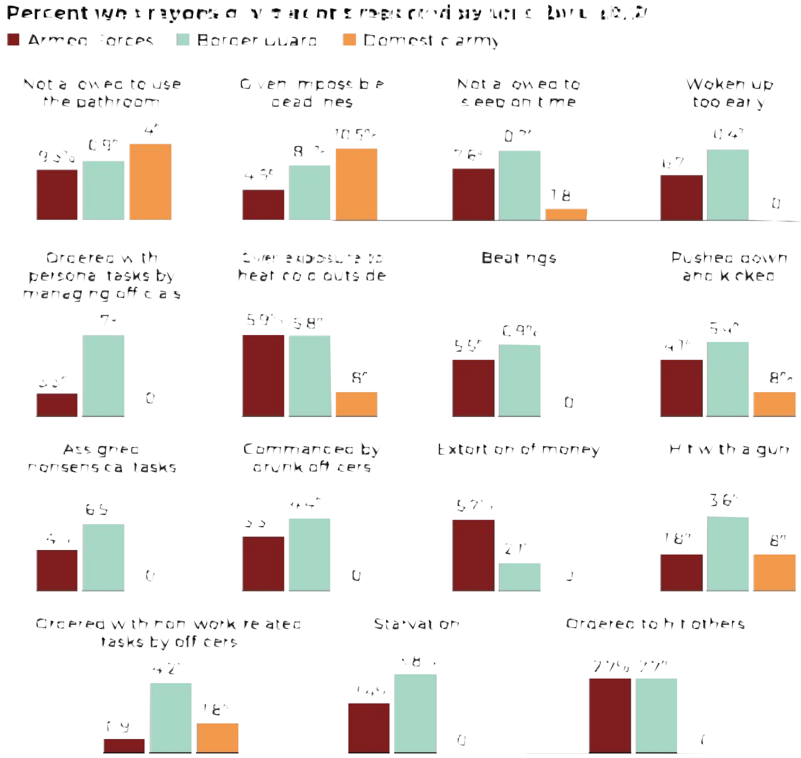
Rights Violations Faced by Soldiers in Mongolia's Military